

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 18658 01 OF 02 302042Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11 AID-05
IO-13 CA-01 ACDA-12 /098 W
-----115303 302129Z /23
R 301022Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7012

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 18658

FOL MSG RECD ACTION BANGKOK INFO VIENTIANE DTD 261200Z JUN 78
AND BEING REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO:

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 0142

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF TH LA
SUBJECT: HMONG REFUGEE DESCRIBES FLIGHT TO THAILAND
REF: A) UDORN 0130 (B) UDORN 0132 (C) UDORN 0118

1. DURING VISIT TO PHON PHISAI DISTRICT, NONG KHAI PROVINCE, JUNE 19, CONREP INTERVIEWED HMONG REFUGEE LEADER OF GROUP OF NEW ARRIVALS WHO ENTERED DISTRICT TWO DAYS EARLIER.
2. REFUGEE LEADER IS A 34 YEAR OLD HMONG MALE FROM MUANG AO VILLAGE, LOCATED APPROXIMATELY TWENTY FIVE KILOMETERS SOUTHEAST OF PHU BIA MOUNTAIN. HE DESCRIBED IN SOME DETAIL FLIGHT OF HIS GROUP TO THAILAND.
3. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, HIS GROUP OF HMONG, ORIGINALLY NUMBERING ABOUT 1000 MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, DEPARTED MUANG AO JUNE 1. EARLY MORNING OF JUNE 2, IN AREA OF MUANG AO TAI (IN VICINITY OF COORDINATES TF 9978) THEY CLASHED WITH BLOCKING FORCE OF SRV TROOPS RESULTING IN THREE HMONG KIA AND CAPTURE OF ABOUT HALF OF GROUP. FOLLOWING
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 18658 01 OF 02 302042Z

- FIREFIGHT, REMAINING HMONG SPLIT INTO SEVERAL SMALL BANDS AND FLED IN VARIOUS DIRECTIONS. SOURCE'S GROUP OF MORE THAN 100 HMONG CONTINUED TO JOURNEY TOWARDS MEKONG RIVER.
4. SOURCE REPORTED THAT A MEMBER OF HIS NEW GROUP WAS KILLED AFTER STEPPING ON LAND MINE IN AREA OF PHU NA SAI

(COORDINATES UF 0353) JUNE 8. THREE DAYS LATER CONTACT WITH A UNIT OF SRV SOLDIERS IN AREA OF BAN NAM LUK (COORDINATES UF0333) PRODUCED ANOTHER HMONG KIA.

5. SOURCE SAID THAT HIS GROUP SURPRISED AND CAPTURED FOUR LPDR SOLDIERS IN AREA OF PAKXZ E-BAN TOUY CROSSROADS (COORDINATES UF0925) JUNE 16 AND 17. FROM QDEBRIEFING OF THESE SOLDIERS SOURCE LEARNED THAT ON OR ABOUT JUNE 7 A BAND OF APPROXIMATELY SIXTY STARVING HMONG REFUGEES SURRENDERED TO SRV TROOPS NEAR BAN TOUY. VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS REPORTEDLY SENT HMONG TO DETENTION CAMP LOCATED AT BAN PA RAI IN VICINITY OF COORDINATES UF0931.

6. SOURCE STATED THAT HIS GROUP FINALLY REACHED BANK OF MEKONG RIVER NEAR BAN PAK TOUY (COORDINATES UF1222) JUNE 17. IN A LAST ENCOUNTER WITH VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS AT THIS POINT HMONG SUFFERED FIVE KIA AND ABOUT 30 CAPTURED.

7. SOURCE ESTIMATED THAT ONLY SIX OR SEVEN HUNDRED HMONG NOW REMAIN IN AREA OF HIS NATIVE VILLAGE OF MUANG AO. HE DISCLOSED THAT ON MAY 24-25 A GROUP OF ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED HMONG HAD LEFT MUANG AO FOR PHU BIA MOUNTAIN AREA IN AN ATTEMPT TO JOIN UP WITH LARGE NUMBER OF HMONG UNDER LEADERSHIP OF SAI SOUA YANG WHO CONTINUE TO OFFER RESISTANCE TO LPDR/SRV MILITARY SWEEPS. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, GROUP WAS AMBUSHED BY VIETNAMESE UNIT LOSING THIRTY FIVE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 18658 01 OF 02 302042Z

KILLED AND A LARGE NUMBER CAPTURED. ONLY A FEW HMONG RETURNED TO MUANG AO TO TELL STORY.

8. COMMENT: HMONG REFUGEE LEADER'S ACCOUNT PROVIDED ABOVE, TOGETHER WITH REPORT IN REFTEL A, ARE BUT A SAMPLING OF LITANY OF GRIM STORIES THAT WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED IN INTERVIEWS WITH HNONG REFUGEES ENTERING PHON PHISAI AND BUNG KAN DISTRICTS. WE HAVE REFRAINED FROM REPORTING IN DEHAIL MOST OF THESE ACCOUNTS BECAUSE, AS IS CASE WITH MANY OF REFUGEE REPORTS, THEY ARE DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO CONFIRM. LATELY, HOWEVER, STORIES FROM AMONG NEW HMONG ARRIVALS REGARDING HARDSHIPS SUFFERED AS RESULT OF LPDR/SRV MILITARY OPERATIONS HAVE BEEN SO WIDESPREAD THAT WE THINK IT IS WORTHWHILE TO RECORD AT LEAST A FEW ILLUSTRATIVE

EXAMPLES OF SOME OF THEIR MORE SOBER REPORTS.

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 18658 02 OF 02 302045Z
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IO-13 ACDA-12 CA-01 /098 W
-----115410 302128Z /23

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 18658

9. WE WOULD ALSO TAKE THIS OPPERTUNITY TO NOTE THAT AS INFLUX OF HMONG REFUGEESE FROM PHU BIA NEARS END OF FOURTH MONTH, IT SHOWS NO SIGN OF ABATING. NUMBERS OF MONTHLY ARRIVALS DROPPED SHARPLY IN MAY BUT IS ON RISE AGAIN THIS MONTH. BASED ON OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH HMONG REFUGEE LEADERS AND KNOWLEDGABLE THAI OFFICIALS, WE ESTIMATE THAT FOUR TO FIVE THOUSAND HMONG HAVE BEEN INVOLVED THUS FAR IN FLIGHT TO NONG KHAI PROVINCE. ABOUT 2600 HAVE SUCCESSFULLY CROSSED MEKONG RIVER AND FOUND ASYLUM IN THAILAND. WE WOULD CONSERVAT MSGY ESTIMATE HMONG CASULTIES DURING EXODUS AS RESULT OF ARMED CLASHES, DROWNING AND SICKNESS, AT 250-650 (I.E. EQUIVALENT TO 15-25 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO MADE IT TO NONG KHAI). AN ADDITIONAL 300-1000 HMONG APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY SRV/LPDR FORCES AND PERHAPS ANOTHER 500-750 HAVE BECOME DISCOURAGED BY RIGORS OF JOURNEY AND RETURNED TO PHU BIA. WE CALCULATE THAT THERE ARE STILL APPROXIMATELY 10-15 THOUSAND HMONG IN GENERAL AREA OF PHU BIA, WITH PERHARE FURTHER 20830 THOUSAND HMONG SITUATED AT SCATTEREED POINTS SOUTH AND EAST OF THAT LOCATION.

10. HMONG REPRESENTATIVES STILL MAINTAIN THAT ONGOING LPDR/SRV SUPPRESSION OPERATIONS AND LACK OF FOOD ARE PRIMARY FORCES BEHIND MOVE TO THAILAND. HOWEVER, THIS IS ONLY ONE VIEW OF SITUATION. FOR EXAMPLE, WE DO NOT KNOW IF LPDR HAS MADE ANY GENUINE EFFORT TO RESETTLE HMONG IN FAIR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 18658 02 OF 02 302045Z

MANNER MANNER PRIOR TO LAUNCHING MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THEM. ALSO, THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE SUGGESTING THAT SOME OF HMONG WERE ENGAGED IN RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES WITH PERHAPS MODEST SUPPORT FROM BOTH OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL ELEMENTS IN THAILAND. THUS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HMONG COULD

HAVE PROVOKED SOME OF ARMED ATTACKS LAUNCHED AGAINST THEM THROUGH UNWISE MILITARY ACTIVITIES OF THEIR OWN.

11. ABOUT ALL WE CAN STATE WITH ANY DEGREE OF CERTAINTY AT THIS POINT IS THAT, FOR WHATEVER REASONS, LPDR, ASSISTED BY SRV, CONTINUES TO DIRECT MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST HMONG IN AND AROUND PHU BIA WHICH ARE INFLECTING GREAT HARDSHIPS ON HILLTRIBESMEN, DRIVING SOME OF THEM TO SEEK REFURE PN THAILAND.

12. FLIGHT OF HMONG, IN TERMS OF NUMBERS OF PEOPLE INVOLVED, IS BUT A MINOR FOOTNOTE OF REFUGEE EXODUS FROM INDOCHINA COUNTRIES, CURRENTLY HIGHLIGHTED BY RENEWED OUTPOURINGS OF VIETNAMESE BOAT PEOPLE AND LOWLAND LAO. BUT TRAGIC STORY OF HILLTRIBESMEN IN PHU BIA SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED COMPLETELY. THEY ARE PAYING A STEEP PRICE FOR THEIR FORMER ASSOCIATION WITH U.S. AND THEIR STUBBORN REFUSAL TO SUBMIT TO NEW VIENTIANE AUTHORITIES. REGRETABLEY, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO ENDURE FURTHER SUFFERINGS FOR SOME TIME TO COME.
FINNEY UNQUOTE
O'DONOHUE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BANGKO18658
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780271-0611
Format: TEL
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978065/aaaaadwn.tel
Line Count: 192
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 70bf5087-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 UDORN 130, 78 UDORN 132, 78 UDORN 118
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2318385
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HMONG REFUGEE DESCRIBES FLIGHT TO THAILAND
TAGS: SREF, TH, LA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/70bf5087-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014